

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM USINT BAGHDAD
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AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 BAGHDAB 1756

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MILI, MASS, PEPR, IZ, UR
SUBJECT: THE IRAQI-SOVIET MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

1. SUMMARY: THE GOI IS INCREASINGLY AWARE OF THE DANGERS
INHERENT IN THE MILITARY SUPPLY DEPENDENCY THAT HAS
DEVELOPED WITH THE USSR AND HAS UNDERTAKEN EFFORTS TO
REDUCT IT. A NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS HAMPER THE
PROGRAM AND WILL REQUIRE CAREFUL ATTENTION AND
TIME BEFORE THEY CAN BE RESOLVED. THE END RESULT, AS
WELL AS THE PROCESS ITSELF, SHOULD BE OF BENEFIT TO THE
WEST. END SUMMARY.

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2. THERE IS NO DOUBT WHATEVER THAT IRAQ IS INTERESTED
IN DIVERSIFYING ITS ARMS PROCUREMENT SOURCES AND REDUCING
THE ROLE PLAYED BY THE USSR. THE PROGRAM HAS BEEN IN EFFECT
FOR SOME TIME BUT WITH AS YET ONLY LIMITED SUCCESS.
THE GOI IS NOT THE FIRST NATION THAT HAS BECOME AWARE
OF THE DIFFICULTIES GENERATED BY RELIANCE ON A SINGLE
SUPPLIER, ESPECIALLY THE SOVIETS, AND WAS PROBABLY

CONCERNED BEFORE THE DRAMATIC ILLUSTRATION OF THE PROBLEM PROVIDED BY THE SADAT EXPERIENCE. THERE ARE PERSISTENT RUMORS THAT THE GOI HAS ALREADY ATTEMPTED TO PURCHASE EXTENSIVE QUANTITIES OF SPARE PARTS FOR ITS EXISTING SOVIET-ORIGIN INVENTORY, TO PROVIDE A CUSHION AGAINST ADVERSE DEVELOPMENTS, BUT WAS UNSUCCESSFUL. THIS REFUSAL GAVE THE IRAQIS FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE WITH THE PARADOX THEY ARE FACING SINCE IT SERVED AS A DETERRENT AS WELL AS AN IMPETUS TO THE DESIRE TO LOOSEN THE RUSSIAN EMBRACE.

3. THE IRAQIS ARE UNEASY OVER THE SITUATION FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH IS THE SHARP CONFLICT WITH THE BASIC BAAH POLICY OF INDEPENDENCE. THE PRESENT SITUATION HAMPERS FLEXIBILITY, NECESSITATES A MEASURE OF ACCOMMODATION BOTH INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY AND, SHOULD THINGS TURN SOUR, THREATENS SURVIVAL. WHEN DEALING WITH THE SOVIETS, AS IRAQ WELL KNOWS, THERE IS THE ADDITIONAL PROBLEM OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNAL POLITICAL TROUBLEMAKING OF SERIOUS PROPORTIONS.

4. NATIONAL PARANOIA TENDS TO CAST POTENTIAL WESTERN SUPPLIERS IN SOMEWHAT THE SAME ROLE AS THE BLOC. THE IRAQIS EVIDENTLY FEAR THAT THE WEST IS JUST AS LIKELY TO EXTRACT ADVANTAGES FROM AN EXTENSIVE MILITARY RELATIONSHIP, ESPECIALLY SINCE THE U.S. IS PERCEIVED CONFIDENTIAL

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AS ABLE TO CONTROL THE ACTIONS OF A NUMBER OF EUROPEAN NATIONS (TO SOME DEGREE) IN ITS OWN INTERESTS. SINCE THE WEST IS NOT NEARLY AS MONOLITHIC AS THE EAST, HOWEVER, AND DOES NOT EXPORT ITS POLITICS IN THE SAME MANNER, THE OVERALL POTENTIAL PROBLEM IS REDUCED. FRANCE, TO TAKE ONLY ONE EXAMPLE, ENJOYS A REPUTATION FOR A WIDER MEASURE OF INDEPENDENCE THAN CERTAIN OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND ALSO WILLINGLY PURVEYS AN EXTENSIVE ARRAY OF MODERN ARMAMENTS.

5. THE PRESENT RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SOVIETS IS FURTHER BURDENED BY THE FACT THAT RUSSIA'S OTHER BIG CUSTOMER IN THE AREA IS SYRIA, IRAQ'S MOST HOSTILE NEIGHBOR. ANYTHING THE USSR DOES FOR SYRIA IS TOO MUCH, WITH THE REVERSE HOLDING TRUE FOR IRAQ. FURTHER, A CLASH WITH SYRIA MIGHT FORCE THE RUSSIANS TO MAKE A CHOICE BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES AND THE DECISION COULD CONCEIVABLY GO AGAINST IRAQ, A SPECTER THAT REPORTEDLY HAUNTS THE LEADERSHIP.

6. CHANGING THE EXISTING ARMS SUPPLY PATTERN REQUIRES BOTH THE DESIRE TO DO SO AND THE WHEREWITHAL.

THE GOI NOW HAS AMPLE FUNDS TO PURCHASE WHAT IT WANTS,
ONCE THE OTHER NECESSARY ARRANGEMENTS CAN BE COMPLETED,
AND NO LONGER HAS TO RELY ON LOANS, GRANTS OR SPECIAL
TERMS. THE THIRD INGREDIENT THAT IRAQ REQUIRES
IS TIME, PARTICULARLY SINCE RELATIVELY LARGE QUANTITIES
OF RELATIVELY SOPHISTICATED EQUIPMENT ARE INVOLVED,
CHOICES ARE DIFFICULT, AND THE NEGOTIATIONS COMPLICATED.
SELECTING, BUYING, RECEIVING AND INTEGRATING NEW
EQUIPMENT CANNOT BE QUICKLY OR EASILY DONE, ESPECIALLY
WHEN IT MUST ALSO BE DONE IN A MANNER THAT DOES NOT
LEAD TO AN ABRUPT RPTURE WITH THE USSR.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 BAGHDAD 1756

7. PROBLEMS HAVE ALREADY BEEN CREATED BY THE EFFORTS
TO SWITCH.

WE UNDERSTAND THAT EACH TIME A REPORT
SURFACES CONCERNING IRAQI INTEREST IN PROCURING AN
ITEM OF EQUIPMENT FROM A WESTERN SOURCE,
N.G. BRAZILIAN
ARMORED CARS, THE SOVIETS IMMEDIATELY MAKE AN OFFER OF
SIMILAR EQUIPMENT AT EXTREMELY ATTRACTIVE PRICES AND

WITH VERY RAPID DELIVERY SCHEDULES. THE OFFER IS ACCOMPANIED BY POLITICAL/MILITARY ARM-TWISTING, UNDERLINING THE BREADTH, DEPTH AND IMPORTANCE OF THE OVERALL RELATIONSHIP, AND POINTING OUT THE DIFFICULTIES THAT WOULD BE GENERATED BY ATTEMPTING TO INTEGRATE AN
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OUTSIDERS' MATERIEL AND PERSONNEL. THE THREAT OF

INTERRUPTED DELIVERIES IS ALWAYS THERE AND, AS MENTIONED, BOTH IMPEDES EFFORTS TO ESCAPE AND GENERATES A GREATER DESIRE. (IT IS NOT CLEAR HOW FAR THE USSR IS WILLING TO GO IN APPLYING PRESSURE. THIS IS PART OF THE LARGER IRAQI-SOVIET RELATIONSHIP, WHICH WILL BE TREATED SEPARATELY.)

8. FROM AN INTERNAL POINT OF VIEW, EFFORTS TO ALTER SOURCES HAVE MADE THE ARMED FORCES RESTLESS. THERE ARE ALREADY RUMORS OF DISSATISFACTION BECAUSE MANY OF THE MILITARY SEE THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERTISE THEY HAVE ACQUIRED IN EXISTING EQUIPMENT AND/OR RELATED TACTICS BECOMING LESS IMPORTANT AND SIGNIFICANT FOR THEIR CAREERS. FURTHER COMPLICATIONS RESULT FROM THE GENERALLY EASTWARD-LEANING POLITICAL ORIENTATION OF THE ARMED FORCES, DEVELOPED DURING THE LONG AND CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE BLOC AS WELL AS FROM THE SPECIFIC INDOCTRINATION TO WHICH SOME OF THE PERSONNEL, ESPECIALLY PILOTS, HAVE BEEN EXPOSED.

9. THESE LATTER PROBLEMS, WHICH MANY OBSERVERS CONSIDER QUITE SERIOUS, MAY CONTRIBUTE TO THE REASONS BEHIND THE CONSTANT TRANSFERS, PURGES AND FORCED RETIREMENTS THAT PLAGUE THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. THE GOI'S LEADERSHIP IS OBLIGED TO BALANCE ITS NEED TO KEEP THE ARMED FORCES IN LINE WITH, INTER ALIA, ITS EVIDENT DESIRE TO SHIFT AWAY FROM TOTAL RELIANCE ON THE SOVIET UNION AND ITS ALLIES, FOR YEARS THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT SOURCE OF OUTSIDE POLITICAL BELIEFS
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TO WHICH THE IRAQI MILITARY HAVE BEEN EXPOSED. IN ADDITION, BAATH IDEOLOGY CASTS THE EAST IN THE GENERAL ROLE OF FRIENDS AND PROTECTORS AND THE WEST, THE NEW POTENTIAL SUPPLIERS, AS THE ENEMIES. STRIKING THE BALANCE

HAS NOT BEEN AN EASY TASK, AND THE GOI HAS BEEN
NEITHER ADROIT NOR CLEVER IN HANDLING IT.

10. AN ADDED SIGNIFICANT FACTOR, CLOSELY RELATED TO THE
OVERALL MORALE QUESTION ALTHOUGH SEPARATE FROM THE
ISSUE OF SUPPLIERS, IS THE REGIME'S OBJECTIVE OF
INSURING THAT THE PARTY CONTROLS THE MILITARY. THIS
NECESSITATES PUTTING BAATHIS, PRESUMABLY LOYAL TO THE
LEADERSHIP, IN POSITIONS OF POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY.
THE DANGER OF PLACING YOUNG, ACTIVE, AND IDEOLOGICALLY
ORIENTED OFFICERS IN SUCH POSITIONS HAS BEEN ILLUSTRATED
TOO MANY TIMES IN TOO MANY COUNTRIES TO ESCAPE THE AWARENESS
OF THE GOI, BUT THE ALTERNATIVES
ARE EQUALLY UNATTRACTIVE. THEIR PREFERENCE GIVEN TO
BAATHIS, WITH OR WITHOUT OTHER QUALIFICATIONS, IS
ALSO AN UNSETTLING ELEMENT TO THE ARMED FORCES. IT
ADDS TO THE OVERALL MALAISE THAT IS CONSTANTLY RUMORED,
AS DID THE APPOINTMENT OF LT. COL. ADNAN KHAIRALLAH
TALFAH (PRESIDENT BAKR'S SON-IN-LAW AS WELL AS
SADDAM HUSSEIN'S BROTHER-IN-LAW) AS MINISTER OF
DEFENSE. HIS SUBSEQUENT ELEVATION TO AIR CHIEF MARSHALL
(HE IS NOT A PILOT), SERVES AS AN EXAMPLE OF EGREGIOUS
HACK-RAISING.

11. RECENT EFFORTS TO MOLLIFY THE ARMED FORCES HAVE
RANGED FROM SIGNIFICANT PAY RAISES TO ADMISSION TO
UNIVERSITIES WITHOUT REGARD TO QUALIFICATIONS. THESE
GESTURES ARE REPORTEDLY NOT SUFFICIENT TO OFFSET THE
PROBLEMS MENTIONED ABOVE, TO WHICH MUST BE ADDED THE
GENUINE CONCERN OF CAREER MILITARY PERSONNEL THAT
INTERRUPTION OF SUPPLY CHANNELS, A LA EGYPT, COULD
HAVE A POTENTIALLY CRITICAL IMPACT ON IRAQ'S ABILITY
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TO DEFEND ITSELF AND THE REVOLUTION.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 BAGHDAD 1756

12. VIEWED FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THIS DILEMMA,
THERE ARE PERHAPS SUPPLIER-RELATED MOTIVES AMONG THE
OTHERS THAT HAVE PRODUCED THE RECENT, AT LEAST
SUPERFICIAL IMPROVEMENTS IN IRAQ'S RELATIONS
WITH SOME OF ITS NEIGHBORS. LARGELY AS THE RESULT OF
ITS OWN EFFORTS, IRAQ IS SURROUNDED BY COUNTRIES
THAT RANGE FROM SUSPICIOUS TO HOSTILE. (IT IS ALSO
WORTH NOTING THAT - WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SYRIA, ALL
OF THEM HAVE ARMED FORCES THAT RELY ON THE U.S. AND
ITS ALLIES.) BECAUSE OF THE STRONG AND PUBLICLY-EXPRESSED
DESIRE TO EXPORT

THE REVOLUTION, UNIFY THE ARAB WORLD,
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AND COMBAT THE FORCES OF EVIL (DEFINED AS ALMOST EVERYONE
ELSE), IRAQ BOTH NEEDED AND WANTED A LARGE AND POWERFUL
ARMED FORCE, CAPABLE OF ACTION ON MORE THAN ONE FRONT.
INTERNAL PROBLEMS, IN PARTICULAR THE KURDISH REBELLION,
ALSO NECESSITATED HEAVY CONCENTRATION ON THE MILITARY.
THERE WAS ONLY ONE MEANINGFUL SUPPLIER, AND THE
PRESENT SITUATION IS THE LOGICAL OUTCOME OF SOVIET
WILLINGNESS AND EAGERNESS TO PROVIDE THE MEANS THE
GOI DESIRED.

13. INSOFAR AS MAJOR MILITARY ACTION IS CONCERNED,
THE KURDISH PROBLEM IS LARGELY RESOLVED, REMOVING ONE
OF THE MORE PRESSING NEEDS FOR CONTINUED SOVIET
COOPERATION. BY REDUCING TENSION WITH AS MANY OF

ITS NEIGHBORS AS POSSIBLE, AN EFFORT THAT
HAS BEEN RATHER SUCCESSFUL WITH IRQN, KUWAIT AND SAUDIA
ARABIA, THE GOI HAS ALSO SOMEWHAT REDUCED THE POSSIBLE
SHORT-TERM NEED FOR USE OF ITS ARMED FORCES OR AT LEAST
A PROBABLE NEED FOR SIMULTANEOUS MULTI-FRONT
EMPLOYMENT. IN ADDITION TO THE OTHER OBVIOUS
BENEFITS DERIVED, THIS RELATIVE DETENTE PROVIDES A
SORT OF BREATHING SPACE WHILE THE EFFORT TO BROADEN
THE SOURCES OF HARDWARE CONTINUES.

13. IRAQ KEEPS ITS SECRETS WELL AND FEW OUTSIDE OF
THE IMMEDIATE CIRCLE ARE SURE OF WHAT IS LIKELY TO
HAPPEN ON ANY GIVEN ISSUE. ALL THE ABOVE PIECES
SEEM TO FIT THE MILITARY SUPPLY PATTERN, HOWEVER,
AND GENERALLY ACCORD WITH THE OBSERVATIONS OF THOSE
WHO HAVE SOMETHING RESEMBLING ACCESS. THE GOI WANTS
TO LOOSEN ITS MILITARY TIES TO THE USSR, THE USSR
IS NOT COOPERATING, AND MANY OTHER PROBLEMS HAMPER
THE PROGRAM. IT IS IN TRAIN, HOWEVER, AND THE
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EVENTUAL RESULT COULD AND SHOULD BE OF BENEFIT TO THE
WEST, INCLUDING THE U.S.
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NOTE BY OC/T: PARAGRAPH 13 - AS RECEIVED.

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